



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

Friday September 17, 2021

Dear carpenter sisters, brothers, and siblings,

Workers have been pressed from all sides and our conditions have been deteriorating.

Meanwhile, just since the COVID crisis began, American billionaires have become nearly two trillion dollars richer. And the bosses have raked in trillions more over the last decade, while workers fell behind. Seattle home prices have blown up 93 percent during that period. Rents in Seattle have increased by over 25 percent this year alone. Carpenters increasingly cannot afford to live in the city they help build.

But despite all the odds, rank-and-file carpenters are saying enough! My Council office, and my political organization Socialist Alternative, stand unequivocally with carpenters in their fight against the AGC bosses for a fair contract: for paid parking, for fully funded benefits, family-supporting wages, and improved protections against sexual harassment in the workplace. No worker should have to chase overtime, worry about healthcare or retirement or wages just to get by. We will have your back.

We are stronger standing together, united against the bosses, and that's why it's crucial that the Martin Luther King County Labor Council, representing more than 150 unions, has gone on record standing with you in your strike action!

As some of you might know, I am a rank-and-file member of the teachers' union, AFT 1789. As a thrice-elected worker's representative, I take home only \$40,000, and the rest of my \$140,000 City Council salary after taxes goes into a solidarity fund for workers' movements. I think all elected representatives, including elected labor leaders, should also take home the average worker's wage - in order to be accountable to, and in touch with, the needs and living conditions of those they represent. I pledge to donate \$2,000 from this solidarity fund to your strike fund if the carpenters' union sets one up, and I urge labor and community organizations, and progressive elected officials to do the same.

An equal opportunity employer

600 Fourth Avenue, Floor 2 | PO Box 34025, Seattle | Washington 98124-4025

Phone (206) 684-8803 **Fax** (206) 684-8587 **TTY** 711

Email kshama.sawant@seattle.gov

Carpenters are correctly opposing the idea of a four-year contract separating them from the majority of the building trades' contract negotiations. Workers have the most power when we stand united in the face of the bosses' drive for increasing profits at our expense. The fact that all the trades' contracts go together every three years is a rare thing, and we stand with you in your fight to maintain that unity.

We need that unity every day if we're to overcome the attacks on organized labor and millions of working families that the ruling class carries out.

The corporate media are now writing hit pieces, siding with the AGC and attempting to slander striking carpenters as greedy and sexist - saying you are being led to disaster by outside agitators and Marxists. What a dishonest and insulting attack on the heroic efforts of workers leading their own fight. The workers leading this strike have made it very clear there is no place for sexism and racism in their movement. My Council office also, needless to say, opposes all misogyny and bigotry, and has had an 8-year track record of fighting against sexism and racism, as we have fought to uplift all workers and oppressed people. But we also oppose these blatant attempts to take the vile words of a few individuals in an effort to smear this strike and all union members.

It's worth pointing out that the very real issue of harassment is only brought to light by mainstream media when it's used as a weapon against workers fighting to improve their conditions. It's fitting that carpenters have been picketing since yesterday at the Microsoft campus, where Bill Gates was given a pass for years for his sexist, harassing behavior - not to mention the pass long given by corporate executives and the corporate media to Gates's good friend Jeffrey Epstein. The corporate elite harass women, the oppressed, and the whole working class, and then they try to smear union members fighting for their rights.

Similarly, what an insulting mischaracterization of rank-and-file members getting organized and fighting back, to insinuate that they're just being led around by the nose rather than working together to consciously advance their interests. But this is a well-worn tactic of the bosses and their mouthpieces. The labor movements and leaders celebrated today were also vilified in their time. The fight for the eight-hour day was dismissed as being led by bomb throwers and outside agitators. From Peter J. McGuire to Eugene V. Debs and Harry Bridges, they were all painted as despotic radicals with an agenda

separate from the working class. But as socialists, their agenda was nothing more than advancing the interests of workers through collective action, to blaze a path forward against poverty and want, against the brutal rule of the owners, for the democratic organization of society by workers.

These gains were won through struggle, not compromise and capitulation. It's been collaboration with the bosses that's led to decades of defeats and worsening conditions for workers, both union and non-union. We need to rebuild a fighting labor movement if we're going to turn things around. This courageous strike is an important step that can provide an example to workers across the country.

When we fight, we can win. We have seen that when we made Seattle the first major city to win a \$15/hour minimum wage, when we won the Amazon Tax last year to fund union jobs building affordable housing, and when we stood with striking Teamster public school bus drivers who won healthcare and pension demands. When workers fight and win, it inspires workers everywhere. And when union workers use their collective organization to carry out these battles, it lights a beacon to the tens of millions wondering how to improve their conditions, showing that the path forward is into the ranks of organized labor.

As the fighting Teamsters in 1934 said, "All workers to the unions - All unions to the struggle!"

Solidarity!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kshama Sawant', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kshama Sawant
Seattle City Councilmember